ABSTRACT. Between 1996 and 2001 the ‘Métis population’ of Canada skyrocketed from 204,000 to 292,000, an astonishing and demographically improbable increase of 43 per cent. Most puzzling about this ‘increase’ is not so much the unpersuasive explanations offered by statisticians and others but, more fundamentally, the underlying assumption that such a thing as a ‘Métis population’ exists at all. In contrast, I argue that such an idea constitutes an artifact of Canada’s racial/colonial episteme in which ‘the Métis’ – formerly an indigenous nation invaded and displaced in the Canadian nation-state’s westward expansion – have been reduced in public and administrative discourse to include any indigenous individual who identifies as Métis: reduced, in other words, to (part of) a race. The paper argues further that the authority of the Canadian census as a privileged forum of contemporary meaning-making in Canadian society is such that the lack of explicit Census categories to distinguish Métis Nation allegiance further naturalises a racialised construction of Métis at the expense of an indigenously national one.

KEYWORDS: census; indigenous; Métis; nationalism; population; race.

We are all familiar with the disconcerting effect of the proximity of extremes, or, quite simply, with the sudden vicinity of things that have no relation to each other; the mere act of enumeration that heaps them all together has a power of enchantment of its own (Foucault 1970: xvi).

According to Statistics Canada in the five years between 1996 and 2001 Canada’s ‘Métis identity population’ skyrocketed from 204,000 to 292,000, an astonishing and demographically improbable increase of 43 per cent (Statistics Canada 2003a: 14). Statistics Canada2 attempted to explain this dubious increase by virtue of a heightened awareness3 of ‘Métis’ issues which led those not formally identifying as Métis to begin doing so, a phenomenon referred to as ‘ethnic mobility’.4 Likewise, in their analysis of the 2001 Census data, Guimond et al. (2004) underscored the apparent permeability of Métis
identity boundaries, suggesting that the term ‘cannot be associated with any specific language or ethnic origin’ but, rather, that it refers more generally to any ‘... cultural, linguistic and territorial mosaic within which [an Aboriginal] population has identified and developed an original culture. The sense of belonging to this culture has varied over time and in response to political and social events’ (2004: 62, emphasis added).

Although perhaps scholarly in their own right, these explanations are nevertheless troubling for their failure to problematise the underlying, colonially inscribed premise grounding their analysis: namely, that such a thing as a singular, homogenous ‘Métis population’ exists at all. In contrast, this paper argues that these representations are necessarily anchored in a hierarchically organised colonial ‘order of things’ (see Foucault 1970; Stoler 1995) in which, through explicitly differential state policies used to manage different segments of ‘its’ indigenous populations, the term ‘Métis’ has been constituted according to racial rather than indigenous national constructions. In such an ordering, any (indigenous) individual who self-identifies as Métis is counted as such, regardless of the terms used by his or her ancestors to collectively self-identify. This paper is thus analytically structured to position the racialisation of census orderings, first, as a manifestation of Canada’s historical nation-state-building at the displacement of the Métis Nation’s and, second, as an index of the latter’s associated political powerlessness in contemporary Canadian society.

The paper begins by positioning nationalism as an exclusionary and destructive form of political association (i.e. Marx 2003), with a particular emphasis on the Canadian state’s destruction of Métis national power in late nineteenth century western Canada. Part two details the concomitant ascendency and symbolic legitimation (see Bourdieu 1992a and 1992b) of administrative ‘Indian/Canadian’ racial binaries which shaped the contours of Canadian citizenship (see Day 2000; Légaré 1995; Mackey 2002) and within which individuals like Métis, externally designated as ‘mixed blood’, were shoehorned into a growing Canadian state imaginary. We will see that in this ordering, ‘mixed ancestry’ rather than cultural distinctiveness came to be naturalised as a legitimate signifier for ‘Métis’, an ordering reflected in subsequent census classifications. Part three positions the census as a preeminent scientific-technical instrument through which a liberal nation-state like Canada identifies, classifies and manages citizens (those categorised as Aboriginal and otherwise) within its geo-political boundaries. In light of this, part three also seeks to make an intervention into common understandings about the role and power of official statistics in normalising what are in reality highly contested political constructions. Part four demonstrates empirically how, in the 2001 Census Canada questionnaire questions, Métis are produced as racialised objects rather than citizens contra Canadian citizenship. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of the consequences of current constructions of ‘Métis’ in the census and also what a more ‘de-racialised’ categorisation might look like. It is, however, with the issue of Métis nationhood that we begin.
Part I: The Métis nation, then and now

Nations are said to embody a form of collective cultural and political sentiment anchored in (perceptions of) common roots and territory (Anderson 1991), while nationalism encapsulates the associated cultural and political symbols, discourses, traditions and myths which anchor and (re)produce these perceptions of origins and commonality (see Gellner 1983; Hall 1995; Hobsbawm 1983). Such theories of nationalism link it to the imperatives of modernity and industrialisation and, as such, tend (arrogantly) to situate it exclusively within the confines of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century western and central European processes of modern liberal state-building and legitimation.7 Scholars have, however, amply demonstrated the requisite collective political self-consciousness, history and territorial boundaries of North American indigenous nations which long pre-date the arrival of Europeans and, later, colonialism (see Alfred 1995; RCAP 1996: vol. 1; Simpson 2000; Tully 1995).

More specific to the Canadian context, if nations are imagined, Canada’s colonial history makes it clear that not all are imagined equally, nor did European or Euro-Canadian nationhood experiences extend to a respect for indigenous nationhood. Indeed, like all nation-state building (Marx 2003), colonial nation-state building was (and remains) overtly anchored in the differential institutionalisation of nation and citizenship imaginings which required and thus precipitated the attempted dispossession of indigenous nations and their preexisting forms of collective association and citizenship (see Alfred 1995; Day 2000; Moreton-Robinson 2003; Razack 2002; Simpson 2000). In so far as indigenous nations (are forced to) live inside the symbolic and geo-political boundaries of their ‘captor nations’ (Chartrand 1991), contemporary indigenous articulations of nationhood are always implicated in memories of invasion, attempted conquest and (re)settlement (Simpson 2000: 116). As such, the seemingly natural discursive linkage of ‘nation’ with ‘state’ (i.e. one nation = one state) needs to be understood in the context of the sustained campaigns of both physical and symbolic violence necessary to accord the term its legitimacy (see Corrigan and Sayer 1985: 15; Bourdieu 1992b: 112). One such example of violence in the name of state-building was the Canadian state’s invasion of the Métis Nation in the late nineteenth century territory now referred to as western Canada.

Historians often trace the roots of so-called ‘proto-Métis’ to intermarriages between First Nations women and fur traders in the eighteenth-century Upper Great Lakes region of what is now Ontario (see Peterson 1985 for a flavour of this discussion). The birth of ‘the Métis’, however, is usually traced to the ‘Red River’ on the plains of what is now southern Manitoba. The Hudson’s Bay Company’s 1821 takeover of rival fur trading concerns and subsequent ‘systemization and regularization’ (Devine 2004: 111) of fur trade policy – and perhaps more importantly, Métis resistance to it – had, in the space of two generations, effectively rendered them an economic and demographic force in
the region. Throughout the mid-nineteenth century they engaged in a mixed economy of fur trade employment, independent trading, farming and buffalo hunting (Giraud 1986: vol. 2). Red River Métis collectively created, borrowed and combined elements to form a distinctive culture and lifestyle separate from both their Euro-Canadian and First Nations neighbours, including a new language, form of land tenure, laws, a distinctive form of dress, music, a national flag and, in 1869–70, distinctive political institutions. Indeed, by Canada’s formal establishment in 1867 the Métis constituted an indigenous nation of nearly 10,000 people possessing a history, culture, imagined territorial boundaries, national anthem and, perhaps most importantly, a sense of self-consciousness as Métis (Giraud 1986: vol. 2).

With respect to asserting their distinctiveness in national form, their long-standing tensions with the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) (see Bumstead 1999; Giraud 1986) were brought to a head by the HBC’s 1869 transfer of Rupert’s Land to the newly formed state of Canada. In its eagerness to open the ‘Canadian west’ to agricultural immigration from Ontario and Europe, the federal government did not bother consulting with, among other indigenous peoples of the region, the Métis. Indeed, Tough (1992) argues that despite the Métis’ and First Nations’ long-standing occupation, both the HBC and Canada treated the Rupert’s Land territory as terra nullius. Outraged, the Métis leader Louis Riel condemned the transaction: ‘[a]gain, on a late occasion [the HBC] tried to sell us. . . . A Company of strangers, living beyond the ocean, had the audacity to attempt to sell the people of the soil’ (Riel in Tough 1996: 7).

Following the transfer, the Métis blocked access to official cartographers and colonial authorities, formed their own provisional government and drew up a list of demands to Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada’s Prime Minister at the time (Sprague 1988). In their ‘Declaration of the people of Rupert’s Land and the North-West’, John Bruce (President) and Louis Riel (Secretary) proclaimed

> in the name of the people of Rupert’s Land and the North-West, that we have, on the said 24th day of November, 1869 . . . established a Provisional Government, and hold it to be the only and lawful authority now in existence in Rupert’s Land and the North-West which claims the obedience and respect of the people; that, meanwhile, we hold ourselves in readiness to enter in such negotiations with the Canadian Government as may be favourable for the good government and prosperity of this people (in Oliver 1915: 906).

This political activity forced the Canadian government to recognise a Métis interest in ‘their’ recently acquired land, and, albeit grudgingly, to recognise the legitimacy of their provisional government. It also gave rise to formal negotiations between the Canadian government and the Métis as a distinct people, which led to the creation of the Manitoba Act’s setting aside of 1.4 million acres of land for their collective possession (Tough 1996: 114–17). Dobbin (1981: 22) argues that this Act

gave the Métis the two elements they needed to ensure their national liberation: control over capital and a share of state power . . . [f]or the few short months in 1869–70 that the provisional government was in place the Métis people had enjoyed complete sovereignty and were, in fact, a nation in the full sense of the term.

It was not to be, however. Subsequent Canadian policies opened the floodgates to settler immigration and officials turned a blind eye to irregularities in the Manitoba Act’s land implementation policies (Sprague 1988). Both events solidified previous discontent among Métis such that by 1885, the spectre of armed conflict again arose between Métis and the Canadian state. After the 1869–70 conflict, Louis Riel fled to the United States to avoid persecution but, upon the request of several respected Métis leaders, returned to Canada in 1884 to assist with Métis grievances. He formed a second provisional government to block Canadian expansion. Despite several small initial military victories under the leadership of another respected Métis leader, Gabriel Dumont, extensive internal division within the provisional government and the completion of a railway to the Red River area conspired to defeat the Métis at the 1885 Battle of Batoche (see Stanley 1960). Riel was charged with treason, hanged on 11 November 1885 and the subsequent influx of white settlers into the region precipitated a large-scale diaspora of Red River Métis (already begun following the mal-implementation of the Manitoba Act in 1870) into western and northern Canada, and the United States (see Ens 1996; Sprague 1988). Dobbin (1981: 23) suggests that ‘[t]he dispersal of the Métis from Red River spelled the eventual disintegration of Métis nationalism as a force in the North West’. And thus ‘the Métis’, as a collective political alternative to the Canadian state, faded into political obscurity.

Though their defeat at the Battle of Batoche marked the end of Métis political power in western Canada, nearly a century later their descendants incorporated the Métis National Council (MNC) as the ‘voice for the Métis Nation’ during the political turmoil following the 1982 Constitution Act (see Sawchuk 1998). In drawing the boundaries of ‘Métis’ citizenship in Canadian society, the MNC did not purport to represent just any individual who self-identified as ‘Métis’ but, rather, only those self-identifying with the distinctive history, culture and memory of the Métis Nation and Homeland. Two decades later at the 2002 annual general assembly, the MNC finally defined the term ‘Métis’ to reflect these boundaries (which were, for reasons I suggest below, only partially successful): ‘Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation’.12 In this context,

‘Historic Métis Nation’ means the Aboriginal people then known as Métis or Half-Breeds who resided in Historic Métis Nation Homeland;

‘Historic Métis Nation Homeland’ means the area of land in west central North America used and occupied as the traditional territory of the Métis or Half-Breeds as they were then known . . .

Many Métis continue to hold an allegiance to these historical events, territories and consciousness, whether specifically at Red River or as part of the geographically and historically more diffuse ‘Métis Homeland’. Nationhood and its associated nationalism is, however, a winding road, and ‘the Métis’ appear differently depending upon one’s temporal and geographical location along the journey (see Dobbin 1981; Sawchuk 1998). This is no different for contemporary Métis than for many contemporary national configurations and recollections. What is clear, though, is that Métis nationalism continues to endure – if in sentiment rather than actual political power – in the cracks and interstices of Canada’s unitary claims to a ‘tolerant’ nationhood (see Mackey 2002). As discussed next, Canadian citizenship is strongly tethered to powerful and seemingly natural conceptions of race which granted certain citizenship rights to (some) Métis as ‘white’ or classified them as ‘status Indians’ (often based additionally on lifestyle criteria), all the while marginalising their distinctiveness as Métis. In doing so, they naturalised in legal and administrative discourse a racial legibility of Métis as merely denoting indigenous people living outside of treaty and/or off-reserve, rather than signifying allegiance to a geo-politically situated nationhood contra that of the Canadian state. The following section explores this in further detail.

Part II: Métis-as-mixed: racial essentialism writ indigenous

Canadians continue to think about and position race as though it was ‘real’, an essentialisation which has important consequences for how ‘Métis’ is imagined racially rather than nationally. Canadians often shy away from talking about race, though, preferring to use the term ethnicity, itself a relatively recent invention in Canadian official discourse (Day 2000: 171–6). However, Young (1995) reminds those who wish to distinguish teleologically between race, ethnicity and culture that historically, designations of race were always rooted in hierarchical perceptions about culture, and vice versa, such that a movement away from ‘race’ to ‘ethnicity’ or ‘culture’ does not really constitute the kind of break it is often accorded (also see Backhouse 1999: 3–5). In other words, whether speaking about ‘race’, ‘ethnicity’ or ‘culture’, all share in common a differentiatedness from whitestream, Euro-Canadian normativity (see Denis 1997; Légaré 1995).

In any event, race’s ‘realness’ stems from its symbolic power, a term used by Pierre Bourdieu (1992a and 1992b) to indicate the set of fundamental, pre-reflective assumptions that social agents engage in by the mere fact of taking the world for granted, of accepting the world as it is, and of finding it natural . . . being born into a social world, we accept a whole range of postulates, axioms, which go without saying and require no inculcating . . . [o]f all forms of ‘hidden persuasion,’ the most implacable is the one exerted, quite simply by the order of things (Bourdieu 1992b: 168, emphasis in original).
Virtually all enduring forms of power in contemporary liberal-democratic societies require legitimacy – i.e. they must justify the source of their power (Swartz 1997: 88–9; also see Rose 1999). This is primarily and most effectively achieved by converting such power into ‘symbolic capital’. Symbolic power (power imbued with symbolic capital) appears as disinterested, natural or taken-for-granted rather than as arbitrary or socially constructed. In a colonial country like Canada, race – defined as a form of social stratification based on and reproduced through social hierarchies of imagined physical and cultural difference – constitutes a form of power which most Canadians use unthinkingly to shape their social reality. Importantly, census data produced in the wake of such classifications enjoy considerable legitimacy.

However, since at least Said’s Orientalism (1978), colonial history is perused with a more jaundiced eye. The colonial/racialised production of knowledge about indigenous peoples is positioned as a reflection of colonisers’ categories and desires rather than an accurate portrayal of indigenous communities. Thus, in the same way that the Orient was ‘invented’ by European intellectuals and colonial bureaucrats for the purposes of settlement, governance and ‘explanation’, so too ‘Indians’ are the invention of Europeans and Euro-Canadians (Burkhofer 1978; Francis 1992). Francis (1992: 4) goes so far as to suggest that ‘Indians, as we think we know them, do not exist. In fact, there may well be no such thing as an Indian.’ His claim is rooted in the familiar post-structuralist observation that rather than constituting a primordial or self-evident category, ‘Indians’ are the effect of a specific and fundamentally racialised system of representation which has produced a severely limited, isolated and de-contextualised register of texts and discourses about contemporary Canadian indigeneity. Such de-contextualisation relies largely on the symbolic power of race to do the heavy lifting.

In Canada, racialised administrative constructions and the associated boundaries of substantive Canadian citizenship were (and, as we see bellow, remain) deeply rooted in firm convictions about the (supposedly) unbridgeable gaps between ‘white’ and ‘red’ and ‘self’ and ‘other’. Such understandings position the term Métis as part Indian/First Nation. The thinking then, as now, was that since Métis are ‘mixed’ and since ‘mixed ancestry’ people necessarily descend at some point from progenitor First Nations ancestors, Métis are ultimately ‘part’ Indian. The issue here, of course, is not so much that this ‘mixedness’ is untrue or inaccurate since even the Métis National Council’s own narrative makes reference to Métis Nation origins in the intermarriages of First Nations women with fur traders. The problem, rather, is that biological, cultural and linguistic ‘mixedness’ constitute a social fact for all Aboriginal people, First Nations included, who reside in the Canadian nation-state (especially those involved in the fur trade). Thus, though ‘mixedness’ should not, as a matter of logic, possess the differentiating power it does, its persistence evidences the enduring symbolic power of race in shaping the processes of indigenous collective formation and, as I will explain below, the categories of the Canadian census.
Importantly, this form of racialised reasoning has fundamentally shaped Canadian administrative history and the categorisation of Métis as apparently ‘mixed blood’ individuals in the wake of the destruction of Red River as a metropolis of Métis power. Although section 35 of the 1982 Constitution Act formally designates three constitutional groups (Indians, Inuit and Métis), these are more fiction than fact: historical and contemporary distinctions between Métis and Indian are not, nor have they ever been, so neat. By the latter part of the nineteenth century (the beginning of the Canadian government’s attempts to secure effective control in western areas), administrative categories for governing indigenous collectivities were often horrendously ambiguous, an ambiguity exacerbated by numerous post-hoc legislative enactments and spur-of-the-moment, ad hoc policies fabricated by government officials (often during or after the fact) to deal with the detritus of a centuries-old fur trade political economy (see Tough 1996). As fur trade society retreated from the numerous villages dotting northern and western Canada, it left in its wake exceedingly complicated and by no means administratively transparent categories of indigeneity.

The various censuses undertaken by the Canadian state during the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries provide ample evidence of the categorical instability around those designated as ‘mixed Indian/white ancestry’. These censuses, likewise, point to the (by then) powerlessness of Métis to control their positioning in Canadian classifications. For example, in 1901, Canadian state officials carried out Census Population estimates in the ‘Green Lake and Unorganised Territories’ in what is now northern Saskatchewan (northwestern Canada). Like other countries during this era (see Arel 2002), Canadian administrators divided humanity into four mutually exclusive ‘colours’: White, Red, Black and Yellow (Canada 1904: para. 47). The absurdity of such a classification system notwithstanding, these categories were further subdivided into ‘Racial or Tribal Origin’ (again, with little consensus, even among enumerators in the same district), including

[p]ersons of mixed white and red blood – commonly known as ‘breeds’ – [who] will be described by addition of the initial letters ‘f.b.’ for French breed, ‘e.b.’ for English breed, ‘s.b.’ for Scotch breed and ‘i.b.’ for Irish breed. For example: ‘Cree f.b.’ denotes that the person is racially a mixture of Cree and French; and ‘Chippewa s.b.’ denotes that the person is Chippewa and Scotch. Other mixtures of Indians besides the four above specified are rare, and may be described by the letters ‘o.b.’ for other breed (Canada 1904: para. 53).15

Whatever else one takes from this, government officials were clearly (if hopelessly) entangled in an ontology of race within which they attempted to ‘fit’ those designated as being ‘of mixed white and red blood’. Perhaps equally importantly, Métis Nation Métis were powerless to stop the growth, standardisation and naturalisation of such categorisations, a legacy which endures in today’s census. Following 1885 Métis defeat at the hands of the Canadian state, government administrators brushed aside classifications that signified Métis distinctiveness as a people in favour of a racialised ‘Indian-or-white’
dichotomy rooted partly in lifestyle (see Morris 1991 [1880]: 294). Indeed, Canada justified the settlement of Métis Aboriginal title claims on the basis of their ‘part Indianness’ under the ‘scrip’ system, thereby allowing the symbolic ‘de-populating’ of existing claims to their geographical territories (see Day 2000: 116–22).

Although ‘half-breed’ (the Anglo translation of ‘Métis’) appeared as a Census category in 1886, by 1906 the category slipped from the Census radar altogether such that over the next half century, those designated as ‘mixed bloods’ were variously classified as Indian, white, ‘other’ and from time to time again as half-breed. Indeed, Goldmann’s (1993: 9) reconstruction of the census categorisations from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries through which indigenous peoples were counted and about which data were collated demonstrates that census recognition of Métis individuals as Métis amounted to non-recognition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CENSUS</th>
<th>MÉTIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Half-breed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By 1941, census-making represented a crucial technology through which governance knowledge was collated and indigenous populations managed. However, despite the public confidence in their racial categories proffered by census officials, the term ‘Métis’ was, by combination of state machination and affected families’ adaptive survival techniques, undergoing considerable change. For example, many of those legally recognisable as Métis took the opportunity to sign into Treaty, becoming legal ‘Indians’ and taking government provisions to feed their families (Dickason 1992; Tough 1996). Others simply denied their Métis background, assuming other ethnicities (e.g. French) (Lagasse 1958 in Sawchuk 1978: 32). Most however, were ‘pushed out into the Hinterlands of their own Homeland, often being dubbed “the road allowance people”’ (MNC Factum 2003: 8), ‘driven back to the periphery of ... settlements, liv[ing] miserably on the waste lands around them like so many nomadic groups without any definite occupation, and in poor looking huts which [were] often hidden amid rolling land’ (Giraud 1956: 1–2).

Canadian policies exerted a devastating impact on indigenous communities. For example, only a generation after the 1885 conflict, the establishment of western provinces led to the 1930s formation of Métis consciousness-raising based not on ‘Red River’ nationalism but, rather, on broader, socialist oriented goals of social and economic change applied to all Native people outside of
treaty and off reserve (Dobbin 1981: 56). This division between ‘Indian’ and ‘Métis’, though by no means transparent prior to the state saturation efforts of the early twentieth century, has since metastasised into a far more solidified (if less discriminating) status in contemporary Canada, assisted in no small part by the ordination of ‘Indian’ and ‘Métis’ in the 1982 Constitution Act. Indeed, these categories form the basis of those used by Census Canada in its own classification of Aboriginal people. Part three will explore the power of populations and census categories in normalising contemporarily what are in fact historically ambiguous categories.

Part III: The importance of population

Today, ‘population’ constitutes a central object of government concern and a specific field of intervention upon national citizenry (Foucault 2000 [1978]; see generally Curtis 2001; Dean 1999; Rose 1999; also see Scott et al. 2002). Modern rationalities of governing require a vast and detailed knowledge of its citizens’ collective characteristics (i.e. ‘the population’), collected largely through regulated (and regular) state-authorised census-taking. Moreover, if the nation represents a way of imagining community, censuses represent a key empirical manifestation. More instrumentally, census data have come to assume a fundamentally important role in the formation of policy decisions affecting all facets of the lives of Canadian citizens.

Census information is used to redistribute seats in the House of Commons and Provincial Legislative Assemblies, to determine equalization payments and other federal-provincial transfer payments, and to design and assess programs. Business, industry, associations, institutions, academia and media depend on census data as a valuable decision-making tool. Census data are also used to plan important community services such as health care, education, transportation, day-care, fire and police protection, employment and training programs, and housing.

Though it has not always been the case, census data today are fundamentally important to fiscal and programme delivery relationships between federal, provincial and Aboriginal issues-specific government agencies and organisations in areas such as housing, education, health, unemployment, infrastructure and economic development and investment (see FNSI 2004: 2). As such, they represent a key site through which Aboriginal collectivities negotiate their relationship with the Canadian nation-state and, thus, constitute a major site through which their claims of inequality are documented. For example, on 1 April 1999 the Human Resources Department Canada (HRDC) embarked on an Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy which included ‘a five-year commitment focusing on supporting Aboriginal organizations to develop and implement labour market, youth and child care programs that are designed to address the local and regional needs of Aboriginal people’. This programme disburses in the region of $300 million dollars annually, of which approximately $45 million go to Métis participants through Métis-
specific agreements (Métis Nation 2006: 21). These funds are allocated using a National Aboriginal Resource Allocation Model which relies on a complex weighted formula of census data variables for Aboriginal respondents, including population counts.

Despite their legitimacy as facts in contemporary western society, however, populations and the census data used to construct them are fundamentally socio-political processes and are, in this context, most fruitfully understood not as technical instruments passively recording data ‘out there’ but, rather, as an aggressive and centralising technique of ‘looking’ at a (nation-)state’s citizenry: of arranging social relations across time and distance and erasing illegibility by establishing social equivalences between individual citizens within nation-states (see Anderson 1991; Curtis 2001; Scott et al. 2002; Rose 1999: 197–232). If the state constitutes a major engine of contemporary nation-building, the administrative goal of censuses is principally concerned with ‘gaining purchase on dimensions of social life, by ‘investing’ social life in governmental and administrative forms’ (Curtis 2001: 24) in ways that make citizens amenable to governance. Populations and the census which produces them thus do not merely reflect social reality, they produce it through the political rationalities that animate them, the categories and questions used to formulate them, who they include, how they include them and the ways in which such quintessentially political documents are disseminated to broader society as neutral, scientific ‘facts’ (Alonso and Starr 1987: 2). As such, Melissa Nobles’ (2000) point is well taken; though certainly not the only state-sponsored engine of ‘meaning making’ in contemporary society, censuses possess their own independent causal weight in the constitution of social reality.

One can see how census categories might shape official recognition and scientific legitimation. Urla (1993) explains, for example, how Basque nationalists used statistical data around language comprehension to position the Basque language as endangered. Likewise, Arel (2002: 53) demonstrates how American Census categories helped to legitimise popular scientific discourses of race in the mid-nineteenth century. In Canada, administrative distinctions found in the census between, for example, ‘Métis’ and ‘Indian’ are important because they exert an enormous impact on the ways in which the Canadian state governs individuals affiliated as such and the rights and privileges accorded to them (see Sawchuk 1998: 13–27). For example, under section 91(24) of the (then) British North America Act, 1867, the Canadian federal government claimed jurisdiction over ‘Indians and lands reserved for Indians’. Individuals classified as status Indians were considered ‘wards of the state’ and as such, were governed by the 1876 Indian Act as part of (its contemporary title) Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Conversely, individuals designated as Métis were (at least formally) considered ‘full’ citizens and, as such, were left to the mercies of provincial welfare-state government policies for ameliorating the material disadvantage of their residents.

On this note, the Indian Act’s sex discrimination led to the loss of status for thousands of individuals, their families and their descendants, such that they...
were also removed from the Indian Act (and associated governing boundaries) and designated as ‘non-status Indians’. Many of these have since sought (and received) shelter in Métis political organisations precisely on the basis of their mixed ancestry and ‘Johnny-come-lately’ self-identification as Métis. This is notable not least because census data, which use the same identification boundaries, constitute a primary technology through which the relationship between indigenous peoples and the Canadian state is imagined and managed in contemporary Canadian society. In the next section, I explain how the current ambiguity around the ‘Métis’ category in the 2001 census anchors the racialisation crucial to legitimising a population increase of 43 per cent in only five years.

Part IV: The racialisation of Métis in the 2001 Canadian Census

The Canadian Census, carried out every five years on the first and sixth year of each decade, requires all Canadians to answer a ‘short questionnaire’ containing seven questions. Additionally, one in five respondents receives a ‘long questionnaire’ (though all those living on a First Nations reserve receive the long format) including fifty-five questions pertaining to ‘labour activity, income, education, activity limitations, citizenship, housing, ethnic origin and so on’ (Statistics Canada 2003b: 10). Although questions change from census to census, Statistics Canada emphasises continuity between reporting periods to maximise the validity of demographic trend analysis. Ethnic origin questions in particular are important because they constitute a primary means through which Canada’s much-touted multiculturalism policy is assessed (question 17, for example, tabulates data on ethnic origin).

As with non-Aboriginal respondents, only one in five off-reserve Aboriginal respondents receives the long ‘main’ questionnaire. Perhaps surprisingly, the ‘total’ Aboriginal population estimates are derived using only five questions, the ‘Aboriginal identity population’ from four and the ‘Métis identity population’ from a single question. With respect to identifying Métis, question 18 simply asks: ‘Is this person an Aboriginal person, that is, a North American Indian, Métis or Inuit (Eskimo)?’ If the respondent answers yes, she or he may then further identify as ‘North American Indian, Métis or Inuit (Eskimo)?’ If the respondent answers yes, she or he may then further identify as ‘North American Indian, Métis or Inuit (Eskimo)?’ (Statistics Canada 2003b: 11). Answering affirmatively to any of these choices allows them to self-identify with a particular First Nation/Indian Band, after which they are provided the opportunity to print the name of that First Nation on the form. Likewise, all respondents – regardless of how (or even whether) they answer question 18 – are asked whether or not they self-identify as a registered/treaty Indian.

Canadian census categories thus reflect a mix of assumed cultural and legal distinctions, such that one can conceivably self-identify as North American Indian, Métis or Inuit and as a member of a First Nation/Indian Band, with or without reporting ‘status’ as a registered Indian. Likewise, since prior to the
Parliamentary passage of Bill C-31 in 1985 any woman (Aboriginal by descent or not) who married a status Indian gained status under the Indian Act, a respondent need not report Aboriginal ancestry or identity to report membership to a First Nation band community, nor to report holding status as a registered Indian. To muddy the waters further, respondents need not report status to report membership with a First Nation (the non-status Indians described above) nor, in contrast, do they need to report membership to a First Nation to report Indian registration (see Borrows and Rotman 2003). Clearly, despite the addition of an ‘identity’ question in the 1996 Census questionnaire, no clear parameters exist for determining what respondents mean when they self-identify as they do and thus the term ‘Métis’ means nothing other than an official administrative designation for forecasting social spending budgets.

More specifically, between 1996 and 2001, the following increases were recorded for the ‘Métis identity population’ in the main questionnaire responses: Table 1.

This table, constructed by combining the 1996 and 2001 Census Canada population estimates, reveals that most of the provinces experienced at least a twenty per cent upsurge in their ‘Métis’ population. More conceptually, however, the construction of this population estimate clearly requires a certain level of discursive violence which shears ‘Métis’ of any national or even historical political roots and supplements these with a simple emphasis on mixed ancestry. For example, Newfoundland and Labrador (NF) reported an increase of twenty per cent while Nova Scotia (NS) and New Brunswick

<table>
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<th>Province</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>Raw change</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>NF</td>
<td>5,480</td>
<td>4,685</td>
<td>795</td>
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<tr>
<td>NS</td>
<td>3,135</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>2,275</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NB</td>
<td>4,290</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>3,315</td>
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<td>48,340</td>
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<td>125</td>
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<td>10,605</td>
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</tr>
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<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>44,265</td>
<td>26,750</td>
<td>17,515</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


(NB) reported an increase of 280 and 350 per cent, respectively. Historically, however, these increases belie the fact that none of these geographic territories possessed any indigenous communities who self-identified as ‘Métis’. The Newfoundland increase is particularly instructive on this point: in 1991, 2,075 indigenous peoples self-identified as ‘Métis’ in the Aboriginal People Survey, though the term was only introduced in the region in 1975 (Kennedy 1996). Likewise, the lack of self-identification as Métis by historical ‘proto-Métis’ communities in the Upper Great Lakes regions of Ontario (see Peterson 1985) has not prevented a 125 per cent increase over the past five years. This geographical area has more recently become a political hot potato in so far as the recently decided Supreme Court of Canada case *R. v. Powley* (2003) argued that the historical, non-First Nations indigenous communities in that area were, partly by virtue of their mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry, rights-bearing Métis (see Andersen 2005).

All of this is to say that the census questions’ complexity and associated ambiguity is probably unavoidable. Part of censuses’ effectiveness (and associated ambiguity) stems from their incorporation of two elements crucial to administrative intervention: the ability to nationally locate citizens ‘individually’ and uniquely (i.e. by surname, for example census forms are sent to heads of households), but also the provision of standardized information that will allow it to create aggregate statistics about property, income, health, demography, productivity, etc. Although much of the synoptic, aggregate information officials of the modern state require is collected initially through individuals, it must be collected in a form that makes it amenable to an overall statistical profile – a shorthand map of some social or economic condition relevant for state purposes (Scott, Tehranian and Mathias 2002: 10, emphasis in original).

Such standardisation requires the creation of administrative equivalencies between Canadian citizens, regardless of geographical location: thus, an ‘Indian’ in British Columbia is administratively equivalent to an ‘Indian’ in Nova Scotia, and a ‘Métis’ in Alberta to one in New Brunswick. That such an equivalency is normalised in the census is not in question – more puzzling, however, is its acceptance by all of those involved in the creation of the census questionnaire. Moreover, the census’s prohibitive cost means that complex identification issues are whittled down to short, simple questions: ‘[s]pace on the questionnaire is restricted, thereby limiting the number and length of questions that can be asked’ (Statistics Canada 2003c: 27). Providing such short, simple questions requires census takers to assume that their categories hold a stable, plain meaning such that, for example, two respondents of different genders, social class and geographical location who report their self-identification as ‘Métis’ must derive the same meaning from it or, at least, the information must be deemed formally equivalent for census data purposes.

Ultimately, the problem is precisely that Canada’s colonialism and race-associated symbolic power has produced a context within which no single or stable political definition of ‘Métis’ can exist. If race’s symbolic power shapes the category ‘Métis’ to encourage responses from those who see Métis as a
legitimation of their mixed ancestry or, conversely, signifies an allegiance to the Métis Nation, adding an item to the questionnaire that fails to distinguish between these constructions will never constitute a useful way to determine its meaning – in other words, the thing cannot be used to explain itself. Worse, it encourages an analysis of ‘Métis population’ data as though a singular meaning actually exists. To be fair to the administrative imperatives of the Canadian state, this does not necessarily constitute a pressing issue, since for administrative purposes Métis does only possess a single meaning – Abor-iginals other than Indians or Inuit who self-identify as Métis are eligible for certain funding pots but not others. That the inability of the census to differentiate between racial and national constructions of Métis raises so few eyebrows (government or Aboriginal) must be seen as the result of a campaign of symbolic violence traceable back to the origins of the Canadian nation-state and its contemporaneous destruction of the Métis Nation.

Conclusion

In this paper I argued that the contemporary construction of the category ‘Métis’ in the Canadian census questionnaire is caught on the horns of (at least) two competing discourses of legitimacy – race/racialisation, and (indigenous) nationhood. In this larger context, the paper began by exploring nationalist discourses which positioned ‘Métis’ not as a race but as an imagined national community – in other words, as the Métis. These discourses were then juxtaposed with a countervailing discussion of the symbolic power of race in constituting historical and contemporary colonial/administrative constructions of the category ‘Métis’: I explained that this racialisation was crucial to their inclusion as Canadian citizens and the associated reproduction of Canadian nationalism at the cost of the meaningful cultivation of the Métis Nation’s. Though both discourses were and remain crucial to the creation and reproduction of the colonial Canadian nation-state, only racialisation appears to hold any broad valence in contemporary Canadian society.

Undoubtedly, the hierarchy between race and indigenous nationalism is apparent in many social fields within the Canadian nation-state (like, for example the courts), but its inequity is perhaps most acutely felt in a privileged site of administrative intervention, the census. Scott (1998) argues that ‘categories used by state agents are not merely means to make their environment legible; they are an authoritative tune to which most of the population must dance’ (Scott 1998 in Kertzer and Arel 2002: 33). However, things are rarely this straightforward. If censuses do not passively reflect reality, neither do they create it out of whole cloth. Moreover, changing social milieus and shifting institutional arrangements have precipitated a movement from a situation of unilateral imposition of census categories ‘onto’ Aboriginals to one in which not just their presence but their partnership is now taken for
granted through their collaboration in the creation of the Aboriginal Peoples Survey in 1991 and its most recent canvassing in 2007.

This is not, however, a story of linear progress from darker times to a more enlightened era (a modern discourse if ever there was one). Despite the Métis National Council’s involvement in the creation and dissemination of this new APS Métis supplement, for example, the term’s definitional boundaries remain cloudy. In this discursive context ‘Métis’ is neither a nation nor a culture but rather, is tantamount to a polite, characteristically Canadian administrative categorisation for indigenous individuals for whom Indian and Northern Affairs Canada refuses to claim responsibility. If Derrida (1981) is correct, and all terms proceed in terms of hierarchical pairs (one dominant, the other marginal), it seems unlikely that of the discourses of race and nationalism upon which the term ‘Métis’ is perched, the nationalist discourse will ever trump its racialisation in the eyes of the state or whitestream Canada. Race’s symbolic capital is so elementally powerful that it effectively ‘always/ already’ marginalises alternative expressions and manifestations of indigenous collectivity, like that of the Métis Nation. Moreover, it moulds in powerful and largely unacknowledged ways the very strategies the MNC use to shape their relationship(s) with the Canadian state.

However, perhaps a partial solution to this problem exists (or at least, a middle ground), one whose logic is already present in the current census questionnaire configuration. Recall that census questions pertaining to First Nations respondents provides the option to further subcategorise their identification choices in various ways, not least of which is the particular (administrative) community their ‘Indian’ identity is tied to (i.e. their particular First Nation). In much the same way, census makers could add sub-categorisations for Métis in future census questionnaires to reflect the different meanings it has come to encompass. The sub-categorisation might initially look something like a variation of the Métis Nation’s definitional boundaries:

Are you a member of the ‘Métis Nation’, i.e. the Aboriginal people whose ancestors historically self-identified as Métis and who resided in the Historic Métis Nation Homeland of western Canada?

This question possesses the virtue of recognising the Métis Nation as a distinctive indigenous nation without necessarily disallowing other groups from using the term Métis as a self-descriptor. Second, it parallels yet ‘tweaks’ a Métis National Council definition which emphasises external elements (‘the Aboriginal people then known as Métis or Half-Breeds who resided in Historic Métis Nation Homeland’) by focusing more specifically on what should be an obvious strategic starting point for a Métis national historical narrative, collective self-consciousness.

Interestingly, though one would expect a heavy investment by the MNC in clarifying these boundaries, instead it merely (if predictably) used the occasion of the 2001 ‘increase’ to criticise the Canadian government’s lack of funding.
for Métis-specific social programmes and to suggest that the new numbers more accurately ‘reflect[ed] the reality of the Métis Nation’. While such a strategy is probably not without its benefits in the short term (though the jury is still out on even that), it seems to me that in the long run, little good can come of the MNC failing to address and clarify ambiguities around the term ‘Métis’; especially, I would argue, in locales like the census that not only privilege but naturalise its racialised construction. After all, in a colonial place like Canada, if the Métis Nation’s own political representatives won’t police these boundaries, who will?

Notes

1 This increase represents a growth of approximately 9 per cent a year in a country where the typical ‘natural increase’ is approximately 3.5 per cent (see Guimond 2003: 105, footnote 1).
2 Statistics Canada is the official state agency responsible for the formal collection and analysis of census data.
3 Siggner and Costa (2005: 12) more specifically attempt to explain this increased awareness by virtue of several ‘important political and legal milestones’, including the inclusion of Métis in the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the public debate which followed the recognition of Louis Riel (a historical Métis leader) as a ‘father of confederation’, a Supreme Court Métis harvesting rights case (R. v. Powley) and increased land rights recognition in certain provinces.
4 ‘Ethnic mobility refers to people changing, from one census to the next, the reporting of their Aboriginal affiliations from a non-Aboriginal identity to an Aboriginal identity’ (Siggner and Costa 2005: 11. See also Guimond 2003)
5 I explicitly position the issue as being one of ‘indigenous’ nationalism rather than nationalism per se, since the census constitutes a primary means through which Canadian nationalism is presupposed, and through which indigenous subjects are reproduced empirically as Canadian citizens.
6 Although I will have some things to say about the latter in the conclusion, this paper focuses on analysing the main ‘long form’ questionnaire rather than the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS). The APS, a post-censal survey, is the result of extensive consultations between Statistics Canada and various representative Aboriginal, provincial, territorial and government officials to fill in knowledge gaps on ‘issues of [Aboriginal] health, language, employment, income, schooling, housing, and mobility’ (2003b: 7). The most recent APS for which data are publicly available is 2001, where the APS interviewed more than 122,000 of the 1.3 million respondents reporting Aboriginal ancestry in question 17 of the main survey (2003b: 7). Although the APS includes a special supplement on Métis issues, none of the questions pertain specifically to the nationhood or racialisation of Métis identity boundaries. Indeed, the Métis supplement uses the main questionnaire questions to funnel ‘Métis’ respondents into answering the additional questions. Since none of the APS questions contextualise the original long form questions, it retains the same shortcomings evident in the main, long form questionnaire (this remains the case despite the fact that Statistics Canada officials accorded the Métis National Council representatives carte blanche to write the Métis supplement).
7 See Corrigan and Sayer (1985); Gellner (1983); Hobshawm (1983); Weber (1976) for a discussion of the rituals, symbols and institutions through which modern state forms attempt to produce nationalist sentiment and self-consciousness.
8 In Canada, of course, the history of political relations with Quebec make this configuration one of ‘one state = two nations’. Either way, indigenous nationhood is excluded (see Day 2000; Denis 1997; Mackey 2002).
9 Representing all the land surrounding the waters that drained into the Hudson’s Bay (some 2.3 million km²), ‘Rupertsland’ was ‘given’ by King Charles II to the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1670 as part of their original Charter (see Ray, Miller and Tough 2000).

10 In a later order, Riel declared Winnipeg the ‘Capital of the North-West’ [and changed its name to ‘Assiniboia’], a new country which included ‘the Assiniboine River on the South; Red River on the East; McDermott’s Creek on the North, and on the West by Spence’s Creek’ (Riel 4 March 1870 in Oliver 1915: 914).

11 It should be noted, too, that those involved in the original nationalist movement in 1869–70 included a broad cross-section from different classes, including traders, trappers, wage employees and ‘trippers’ (see Bourgeault 1983).


13 See for example Derek Sayer’s (1998) beautiful exploration of the changing contours of Czech national identity over the past four centuries.


15 As it turned out, in its actual enumeration these categories also included ‘Salteaux Breeds’ and ‘Salteaux French Breeds’ (Canada 1904).

16 Scrip consisted of coupons for land or money provided to individual claimants designated as Métis, a process rife with fraud and ‘sharp dealings’ (see Tough 1996 for a discussion of the characteristics and outcome of the scrip system). Scrip represented a stark contrast to the treaty settlement processes used by the Canadian state in negotiations with those they classified as Indians (see Ray et al. 2000).

17 Data on racial origin was not collected in the 1891 census.

18 In 1941, enumeration instructions were as follows: ‘[f]or a person of White and Indian blood, the entry shall be ‘halfbreed’. Interestingly, however, non indigenous ‘mixed blood’ children: that is, ‘the children begotten of marriages between white and black or white and Chinese, etc . . .’ were classified according to their ‘non-white’ parent (Canada 1941: 44–5).


22 See Sawchuk (1998) for a useful and accessible discussion on this issue. Also see Borrows and Rotman (2003).

23 These include name, sex, date of birth, marital status, common-law status, relationship to common law partner, family and household relationships and mother tongue (Statistics Canada 2003b: 10).

24 Question 17 asks an ‘ancestry’ question, rather than a self-identity one. A respondent can conceivably answer ‘yes’ to having Aboriginal ancestry but ‘no’ to self-identifying as such, and, though less likely, vice versa.

25 The figures for Yukon, North West Territories, Nunavut, Prince Edward Island and Quebec have been omitted due to their negligible changes between 1996 and 2001.

26 The(n) MNC president Audrey Poitras argued that ‘[t]hese statistics indicate how critical it is that the federal and provincial governments realize that Métis-specific services and resources are needed across the [country] for the Métis people. The funds set aside for Aboriginal programs from existing resources simply need to be increased to reflect the reality of the Métis Nation.’ See her full comments at: ‘Media Releases, January, 2003.’ Available: http://www.metisnation.ca/press/2003.html# (31 August 2007).

27 To be fair to the MNC, rather that claiming that the entire 2001 increase reflects Métis Nation Métis, they more complexly claim anyone self-identifying as Métis only if they live in Ontario or westward. ‘MNC: Who are the Métis?’ Available: http://www.metisnation.ca/who/index.html (31 August 2007).
References


**Court Cases**